DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 077 24 RC 008 119

TITLE	How Well Do They Represent You? A Handbook on local Rural School Boards fo Parents and Other Citizens.
INSTITUTION	New Mexico State Univ., University Park. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
BUREAU NO	BR-6-2469
PUB DATE	Aug 74
CONTRACT	OEC-1-6-062469-1574(14)
NOTE	24p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Box 3AP, Las Cruces, NM 88003 ($1.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Board of Education Role; Changing Attitudes; *Community Control; *Educational Policy; Educational Responsibility; Evaluation; Government Role; *Parent School Relationship; Politics; Reactive Behavior; *Rural Education; Social Action

ABSTRACT

In recent years, parents and other citizens have lost their influence over local school boards because of increasing enrollment and district consolidation, lack of contact between board members and classroom teachers, teacher organization and subsequent veto power over boards, and the bureaucratization of educational systems. To alleviate this, the handbook on local rural school boards explains what kind of people are board members, how long they serve, and how they are elected or appointed. Subsequent sections cover: (1) how school boards are political, how the State and Federal governments infringe on local authority, and how local governments exercise control; (2) who is really in charge, whether the board members ought to use their own judgement or reflect what their "constituents" prefer, and whether they are representative of the entire public; (3) some strengths and weaknesses; (4) school board responsibilities; (5) how the superintendent and the board work together; (6) how boards report to the public, with suggestions for open meetings, newsletters, annual reports, and handbooks for parents; and (7) how to approach and influence the local school board. Ideas to consider include community involvement, student advisory boards, experimental and volunteer programs, and public surveys. Two checklists, "How does your school board rate?" and "How do you rate as a school patron or parent?" are also given (KM)

ED 096077

How well do they represent you?

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A handbook on local rural school boards for parents and other citizens

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RC008119

The material in this publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the National Farmers Union for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the National Farmers Union or the National Institute of Education.

August 1974

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WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT THE SCHOOL BOARD?

What your community's school board members do and think strongly influences the quality of education available to your child and all children in your school district. That's why you should care.

If you are like most parents, you want your youngster to do well in school. But your aspirations for him or her are even greater than that. . . you want him to have more opportunity, better breaks, a sounder education than you had. You know he deserves to be treated as an individual, a person with undiscovered potential who can do a great deal to educate himself if he is sufficiently stimulated and motivated.

We Americans always have had high expectations of our schools. We want them to be even better than our society as a whole. But in recent years there has been a new mood of questioning and many people have been disappointed.

- Students show their disenchantment. Older ones drop out, resort to harmful drugs, laugh at discipline. Some develop a shell of stupidity which conceals the intelligence they show on the athletic field or almost anywhere outside the classroom. Younger ones often appear bored, apathetic, unreached.
- Taxpayers are rebelling. There is a growing unwillingness to provide unlimited funds for public education.
- Parents feel there is something wrong somewhere: Complaints are aired by the fathers and mothers that the "system" is failing both the advantaged and the deprived students. Schools sometimes try to change children when maybe the schools need to be changed.

These dissatisfactions and their causes and some suggested remedies surfaced in a recent (1974) report: "Control of Public Schools: Can We Get It Back," published by the University of California. The author, Dr. James W. Guthrie, a prominent educator, was to the point: "The public no longer completely controls one of its major institutions, the schools."

How did parents and other citizens come to lose their influence?

This landmark report tells why and how:

1. While our school enrollment was growing rapidly, districts were consolidated. Once we had 100,000 school districts; now we have only 16,000. "Where a school board member once represented a community of 200 people, today each board member speaks for an average of approximately 3,000."

2. Our enrollment of about 50 million school children, ages 5 to 17, now requires almost 3 million classroom teachers, counselors and administrators on the public payroll. As a result, there are several layers of hierarchy or "brass" between board members and the classroom teacher. Teachers feel cut off from their real employers.

3. In order to have more say in decisions which affect them directly, teachers have organized. Through unions which bargain and on occasion strike, "teachers have been given veto power over the school board."

4. Schools, operated like efficient businesses, become uniform and standardized. . . "to a remarkable, some say oppressive, degree," Dr. Guthrie adds. "Seldom do schools admit to the real diversity of tastes and values among their clients."

Your child may be fortunate if he is being educated in a small rural district. "Schools with an enrollment of 200 to 600 can be models for urban communities to follow," Dr. Guthrie says. In that size school, students, teachers, parents and board members can know each other. Still, rural areas have their problems, too. But "changes are in the air," the report says. And an enlightened, determined citizenry *can* get back control of its schools.

Since schools are public business and school board members are "agents" of the public, they must show people clearly what is happening to their children and their money. But how? The purpose of this publication is to suggest ways in which citizens can more actively participate in their local schools to improve educational opportunities for all children.

HOW WELL DO THEY REPRESENT YOU?

School board membership is said to be "the public office closest to the people."

You are especially fortunate to live in a community small enough that you may know personally one or more members of your local board of education. If you lived in a large city, the chances of your knowing any members would be quite slim. Also reassuring: The size of a school or district is not necessarily related to the quality of education. Bigger need not be better. In fact, some educators now recommend the size and the learning climate of the Little Red School House your parents or grandparents attended.

What kind of people are board members?

About 100,000 Americans serve on school boards, for the most part without pay—as a public service. They have many occupations—dentists, lawyers, housewives, merchants, farmers, professors, managers and laborers. About 4% are manual workers; the professions and business contribute about 65%. Men outnumber women by a ratio of 9 to 1.

Seven out of 10 school board members have children in school, while in the general public four people out of 10 have school-age children. In Texas, for example, the median age of board members is 47; in some states a person under 21 years of age cannot legally serve on a school board.

How long do these people serve? Anywhere from one to seven years, but in small districts the term usually is three years, sometimes four. Sometimes terms are staggered so that there are new members and retiring members nearly every year. The size of the district—that is, the pupil enrollment, not the area—also has a lot to do with the size of the board. In thickly populated areas a board may have 10 to 15 members; in small districts the number may be 5 or 7.

How are board members chosen?

The way you select members of your board of education is determined by your state's laws. In 33 states school boards are elected by popular vote; small school districts especially favor elections (90%).

Some states have both appointed and elected boards, and in these cases the appointed ones usually are in large cities, especially cities in the Northeast. There are other geographic preferences, too. Several Southern states favor appointed boards; in the Western states only 11% are appointed.

Who appoints these members? City councils, county boards of commissioners, mayors, governors, judges.

Your state's school law—sometimes called "the state education code"—also governs how board candidates are *nominated.* These are the usual ways:

1. by petition of qualified voters,
2. by public announcement of the candidate,
3. by a primary of a political party,
4. by a caucus of political party members, of local officials or of community organizations and leaders,
5. by a school or town meeting.

Small school districts are more likely than large ones to use the petition method. Geography enters in, too. The North Central states favor this form of nomination. In the Western states individual announcements are more common than elsewhere.

How school boards are "political"

As you can see from the ways they are nominated, school boards are linked to local politics, even if members are chosen without regard to party affiliations. In varying degrees they represent and are a part of the "power structure"—that is, the key influentials and decision-makers of the community. Also, because they have power and are subject to pressures—to fire a cer-

tain teacher or to allocate more money to girls' athletics—they have politics of their own.

In the U.S. we have delegated major responsibility for governing the public schools to local boards. Legally, education is a function of the state carried on under a unique local-state-federal partnership.

How do the state and federal governments infringe on local authority? With carrot and stick. They can reward communities with money, expertise, educational "bonuses" and recognition. They can coerce by withholding money, professional help and special projects.

Legislation may diminish local control. In the State of New York, for example, a school board member in Arcade (population 1,972) is a local agent of the state and is not supposed to "think or act solely in terms of local (Arcade) educational obligations."

Your state also may have laws on delinquency, corporal punishment, the employment and dismissal of teachers. Federal laws on civil rights and economic opportunity apply everywhere.

How does local government exercise control? Town councils and commissions often have some say about budgets and they may help determine the location of schools via zoning ordinances. Sometimes city commissions or village councils supply legal counsel to the school system—a more subtle kind of influence.

By increased use of unions to bargain and call strikes, professional educators have gained more control at the expense of parents and school boards. For example, school boards once regulated what we now consider the private lives of their teachers. Now we consider many aspects of lifestyle to be personal and private because of court decisions and because of sweeping changes in social attitudes.

At any rate, with or without unions, the educational administration and bureaucracy exert pressure on school boards.

You can add other possible "influences" to this list: the Chamber of Commerce; church, civic or fraternal organizations;

the N.A.A.C.P. and other ethnic groups; associations of citizens, taxpayers and parent-teachers, who sometimes knock on the school door timidly or forcefully.

Finally, consider what has been called "the invisible committee." One board member may "hear" the guidance of a wise father; another may "hear" the urgings of an organization to which he belongs; a third "listens" to his immediate family. So instead of five people around the table, in actuality 25 to 30 (not all seen) may enter into a decision. These influences may not be harmful—no more than a wife causing her husband to dress more tastefully.

Who's really in charge here?

A great deal of what school boards do, as you can see, is determined by law, federal guidelines, court decisions, negotiated agreements and budget limitations. Nevertheless, the board can play an important role as an "enabling agency." Its potential for improving the school system and enriching the community is great; on the other hand, its potential for becoming a bottleneck is great, too.

You should remember also, that voters in each school district, by holding ultimate control over local purse strings, have a kind of veto power over school board plans. Here again is the system of checks and balances we have built into our government elsewhere.

Should a school member follow his own judgment in a decision? This one basic question has never been settled. Or should he decide upon the basis of what his "constituents" prefer? In general, most board members and superintendents say the member should rely on his own judgment, but the public is not so sure. Many people want board members to "act as delegates rather than trustees," and the more disenchanted they are with schools the more vocal they will be on this issue of "taxation without representation."

Are school boards representative of the entire public? The answer to this sensitive question is no. Board members usually are better educated, more affluent, have greater social prestige than the average. You have to decide for yourself if this is desirable or not. Perhaps a more important question is: How responsive are board members to changes which will improve the education of our children?

The "system" has strengths and weaknesses

Most school board members who seek election or accept appointments say they do so because they consider it a public duty. Generally, they don't feel there is much wrong with schools; hence few have any axe to grind. Historically, they have been conscientious, giving their time without pay. There are good, honest people on school boards; the talent pool has never been richer.

One study of board members shows appointed board members are more likely to be less "political," to come from an ethnic minority, to have a deep commitment to education than elected members. But these appointed members are "more likely to accept and live with uncomfortable truths" about the schools than elected members.

What do the school boards' critics say?

- That members "are the loyal captives of the conservative Main Street businessman faction."
- That they are more interested in saving taxes than in educating children.
- That they are prejudiced against ethnic minorities.
- That they discriminate against women in hiring policies.
- That they are too materialistic and "success-oriented in the Horatio Alger tradition of getting ahead" and want to force today's youth in this same mold.

- That their concern for drop-outs is mainly because these students become nuisances and threats and can't be "socialized" by the school machinery.
- That they perpetuate testing systems which give an honest picture only of the Anglo-American child, not of children from cultures which place more stock in spontaneity and sociality.
- That they look on children as "untamed bundles of energy to be subdued" rather than as valuable human beings who desperately need to be understood, appreciated and helped.

Likely you can add to or subtract from this list of grievances, depending on your local situation. But before you complain, you need to know more about what your school board does and how it works.

What does a board do?

A board has two main kinds of responsibilities.

First, it must provide teachers and places for them to teach—buildings, playgrounds, books and other needed equipment, utilities and transportation. In most districts all this represents a considerable investment so some board members need knowledge of business management—cost accounting, debt financing and tax law. Fiscal affairs of today's school system are complex because of the proliferation of sources of funds and of special programs and contracts.

Second, a board determines the educational policy for the district—a set of goals and priorities. Hence it needs idea people with courage, insight and the ability to make long-range decisions. Without this element, boards may muddle along, absorbing themselves in routine and trivialities.

What's the difference between a policy and a rule and a goal? Here's an example of a *policy:* "The North Creek Board of Edu-

cation recognizes that volunteers can make many valuable contributions to our schools. The Board endorses a Volunteer Program. . . subject to suitable regulations and safeguards. Appropriate recognition of volunteer services shall be made annually."

Rules would be those "regulations and safeguards" spelled out. They are usually specific, concrete, whereas policies are broad, pre-determined directions for courses of action.

Small districts especially seem to think they don't need written policies or goals. Why? The boards don't know how to go about the job. They consider consultants too expensive. They fear that definite policies would "tie our hands" or be too confining. Yet without these blueprints for the future, boards may simply react to change—not direct it—and suffer from "future shock." Then you and other parents will be left in the dark about what their objectives for your child really are.

Goals of an Indian school in Borrego Pass, N.M.:

1. "To foster the best possible environment that will encourage Indian children to develop positive attitudes about learning;

2. "To make the most of the early years when children are impressionable and can learn so much;

3. "To build a good foundation so children can, and will want to go on to high school and college;

4. "To start children, early, thinking about and developing a foundation for future trades and professions;

5. "To develop the child's full potential so he will not be dependent, but learn to be professionally competent;

6. "To stress the past ways of livelihood of the Navajo through their sheep, cattle, weaving, silversmithing, etc., and yet to have the child recognize that life is changing so he can look to and prepare for the future; and

7. "To help children appreciate and retain their full heritage because it is believed they will be stronger if they know their own ways of life."

Superintendent and board work together

Theoretically, the board "legislates" and the superintendent "administers," but in actual practice the lines get blurred, depending on the personality and leadership of the superintendent and the makeup of the board. In most systems he is an innovator, evaluator, acceptor/rejector, mediator, coordinator and expediter.

As you can see a superintendent needs to have a great many talents of all kinds. Most boards put heavy emphasis on his business ability and knowledge of school finance. They are less likely to consider outstanding intelligence and scholarship necessary qualities when they are in the hiring process.

Ordinarily, new board members look to the superintendent to prepare them for their roles. Often there isn't much in-service training, and many members serve out their terms without ever feeling a need for or seeing the benefit of workshops, seminars, meetings to help them do their jobs better.

If a board's ideas are "entrenched," a new member may immediately get many citizen complaints when he has no notion of how to handle them, for example.

Many boards of education use the committee system to investigate special concerns or projects which require more time than the entire board can spend. If the membership is small (5 or 7 members in all), a committee adds ex officio members, including the superintendent or someone on his administrative staff, plus representatives from the general public. Sometimes boards assign "feasibility studies" to local groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or the League of Women Voters. Or they may get studies done under a commercial contract. . . pay a firm of experts to evaluate and make recommendations.

How boards report to the public:

People want to know what is happening to their children and their money. Even when a board does its job well, if it doesn't re-

port effectively on its stewardship, it can get into hot water. When children are short-changed in education, even the glossiest public relations programs won't satisfy school patrons for long. They want results, not wordy promises.

Combining and enlarging districts makes more difficult the job of board-to-public communication. What makes it easier? Involvement of many parents and citizens. . . as teachers' aides, band boosters, homeroom mothers and fathers, library volunteers, members of advisory councils, athletics fans. Those who know schools best are more likely to support boards and administration than to attack them.

Regardless of the size of the district, a school board needs to use several ways to tell its story to the public. Has your board tried all of these?

1. *Open meetings.* It's one thing to say "the public is invited" and another to make people feel welcome. How is the public invited? Mainly through local newspapers, radio and TV stations. In Kentucky, for example, a law requires announcement of school board meetings through the media.

Public attendance at school board meetings will be increased:

- if people know what subjects are going to be discussed and these topics are lively and of local concern;
- if time, place and themes of meetings are relayed to people by phone calls and special mailings, as well as through the news media;
- if interested citizens are allowed to be heard and taken seriously by the board;
- if the news media follow up meetings with full reports of new policies or changes in policy, with the reasons behind them.

Other successful devices for arousing interest:

You can build a meeting around a format like the public television show, "The Advocates." That is, spokesmen for two points of view can present their cases and be cross-examined—by each other and by "advocates" in the audience.

Or a program can be informative like the Vancouver, B.C.

"Talk-About Nights." Examples: a slidefilm on outdoor recreation and playgrounds; a report on guidance in the elementary grades or on social science projects of high school students. In cases like this, people in the audience appreciate knowing the agenda *(order of the program)*, who the performers are; they also like *fact sheets* to take home. When budgets are discussed, citizens want to *see* the actual figures, not just hear them. And some time should be allowed for questions and brief comments from the audience. Sometimes board members invite their most outspoken critics to important meetings.

What if the subject is something controversial? A course on sex education, proposals for a bond issue to finance a new building, for example. Even then a board meeting need not be a battleground between disgruntled factions. The Canadians advise: Divide the audience into discussion groups—with from 10 to 25 people in a group. This generates person-to-person talk, allows steam to be let off and a variety of opinions to be aired so factions know the *whys* even if an ultimate vote goes against them. Later the full audience needs to hear reports from all groups.

Experienced board members say: Don't sweep controversial problems under the rug. "Sometimes controversy is to be preferred to community apathy," says a Kentucky superintendent. "At least you have people's attention if there's a hot issue." Face up to issues and answer questions. Avoid going into executive session once a public meeting has started. Don't be pushy; don't talk in educational jargon. The path to good boardmanship is a never-ending process and can be a continual learning experience.

2. *Newsletters.* Any publication for all parents and interested citizens should be newsy, open, candid and of widespread general interest. Here is a chance to share new ideas beyond obvious items on school activities. Such newsletters can be modest in their format and inexpensive to produce. What to avoid: making the sheet a mouthpiece for the board—one which editorializes more than it informs.

3. *Annual reports.* A board's report to the public can be a lively play-by-play account of what the schools are doing and why, plus clear explanations of school finances. The author should remember this is aimed at citizens in general—not just for the mayor and other dignitaries. One Canadian board found that a report printed like a tabloid newspaper was cheap enough to be made available to every home.

4. *Handbooks for parents.* How can mothers and fathers help their children by providing an "atmosphere of learning" at home? A school system's handbook for parents can describe how, and in that way assist everyone involved—students, teachers, and all members of the family. It may also tell parents how to prepare for a home visit by the teacher or a parent visit to a school. A parents' handbook might also include: goals of the school district, laws on truancy and punishment, policies on how and why students are expelled or suspended, information about the parent-teacher organization, school athletics, school libraries, vocational courses and guidance, special help for handicapped children, bus transportation and meal service.

A handbook need not be elaborate to be helpful. If your school district does not have one and you would like sample handbooks to study, request these from your state superintendent of public instruction. Alaska has a training manual for members of school boards.

5. *Information "officers."* Large city school systems often employ public information officers to help tell the public what is going on. They work with newspapers, radio and TV stations and citizen groups.

This arrangement usually is too costly for small districts, but you can borrow the idea anyway. A talented volunteer, a part-time employee or a school staff member might serve in this capacity—perhaps with the help and advice of a committee. An information officer also can be valuable in channeling reactions and attitudes of the public back to the board.

How to approach and influence your board

Usually ideas for change don't originate in school boards. They come from professional educators as a rule. But the *motivation* to make improvements often comes from individuals and groups outside the school system. The speed of change depends on how receptive your board is to new ideas.

Can one individual do much? Yes, say experienced citizens and board members; yes, if you go about change in the right way. First, you must understand how school boards work—study this handbook, attend board meetings, ask questions, inform yourself by reading and talking about the issues which concern you. Often these "issues" are phrased in questions, such as:

- Are testing procedures giving us an honest picture of our children's potentials?
- Should we require students to be all-around—good in science as well as English and foreign languages, even in athletics and public speaking?
- Are our children getting good counselling?
- Are our children being fairly graded and how should they be grouped?
- Should we build a new middle school or enlarge an old one?
- Should there be more emphasis on teaching students how to study, think, organize their work?

If you have a grievance and a remedy to suggest to your school board, what is the first step when you are prepared to speak? Let the board president or presiding officer know, so he can schedule you on the program or agenda.

You will have more impact if you find school administrators, and other school patrons or citizens whose concerns and ideas are similar to yours. When you have considerable support for your views, you become an "influential" even if you have never thought of yourself as part of the community's power structure.

What do you do if your board is not responsive to public wishes? Sometimes you can generate enough interest in a parent-teacher membership to get things done. But if the PTA is too dominated by "the establishment," the next step usually is to form a school council of interested citizens.

How do you go about this? Arrange for a meeting place and invite everybody you feel would be interested. At the first meeting you should elect a chairman to preside and plan, and a secretary to keep minutes of the meetings. Other officers can be added as needed. Right away you need to discuss what your purposes are. Everyone should have an opportunity to contribute until a consensus is reached. Eventually you may want written goals and policies. Giving the school board a copy of these will help keep relationships clear. Also this will cut down on suspicion and rumor. The board may need to be reminded that a school council can generate public support for constructive change that might be difficult or impossible for boards and professionals to accomplish.

Some of the topics school councils discuss: needed changes in the curriculum, current methods of teaching, new buildings and facilities, salaries, adult education, additional help on reading and the language arts in elementary grades, counselling and guidance, more financial support for schools. The Portales, N.M. list added food services, in-service training of principals, philosophy of discipline, special programs for various I.Q. levels.

How do you proceed when you agree on your objectives?

1. Analyze yourself as a group—the talents and interests you have. You may need to ask others for help—the school librarian, retired people, experts from universities.

2. Visit other councils to see what they are doing and what they have accomplished.

3. Set yourselves some priorities—what should be done and by what target dates.

4. Study attitudes of the community; you can do this by informal telephone surveys and conversations with friends and neighbors.

5. Build confidence between the council and teachers who otherwise might feel threatened.

6. Continue to evaluate your group by asking what you are achieving, what remains to be done. Sometimes a group will disband after a bond issue has passed or a busing fight resolved. But if you are going to make any significant improvement in the quality of education, some dedicated people may have to devote years—not just weeks.

There will be less friction if your group constantly explores ways to work *with* the school board, not just against it. This takes patience, tact, open-mindedness on everyone's part. The essential need: to keep lines of communication open both ways.

Borrowable ideas you might consider:

- Schools can become learning centers for everybody, regardless of age, and thereby enrich the whole community. For example, the district for Hancock County, Ky. (population 5,000) has opened a building for an art show, sponsored a Little Theater, hired professionals to stage a Shakespearean play. Now people feel the schools (one new, others remodeled) really belong to them.

- A student school board in Norfolk, Va. successfully advises the official one—and administrators, too—on courses the older ones consider "relevant," on a final exam policy, on wallet I.D. cards for high school students. The student board reports what it is undertaking to the "regular" board once a month. And once a year the two boards have a joint luncheon for free discussion of mutual problems in a social atmosphere.

- A citizen's group in Geneva, Ark. is influencing use of funds, hiring and retention of school personnel. The parents become involved as part of an experimental Follow Through program.

- Worried about children's reading and ability to communi-

cate their thoughts? A few years ago 25% of seventh graders in Williamsburg County, S.C. read at the third grade level; some couldn't read at all. Now, after a special experimental program of training aides and team teaching, children in kindergarten through sixth grade have "caught up." They are getting experience in conversation and expressing themselves, too. Attendance is good, interest of students is high, and drop-outs are almost a thing of the past, says the superintendent.

- One way to bridge the generation gap: The school system of Rockford, Ill. employed a spokesman and advocate for students called an "ombudsman" who is a kind of negotiator or go-between. He anticipates problems before they become serious and acts as a "kind of lightning rod for school-community flashpoints."

- Students have worked with adults to update policies of the Shoreline School District, Seattle, Wash. These were adopted after full, free discussion of use of alcohol by students, attendance in class and assemblies conduct, dress, drugs, freedom of expression. Each policy is followed by an explanation:

  "Policy:—Smoking by students is not permitted on school property.

  "Interpolation: This. . . is adopted on two grounds. First, that smoking by students on school property presents a safety hazard which cannot be controlled by the school administration. Second, that both the health of the individual student and the health and freedom from annoyance caused by smoking to the other students are factors of concern to the. . . administration.

- Valley View School District, Lockport, Ill. has been experimenting with a new year-around schedule. Throughout the year (including summer) students attend school for 45 days, then have a 15 day "vacation."

- When a school calls in experts (speech therapists, neurologists, pediatricians, eye specialists) to work with children, the

"clinic" will be more successful and there will be more followup—if the experts first have an opportunity to tell parents how they help children and what they will do. This advice comes from the Columbia-Brazoria (Texas) Independent School District which uses volunteers and aides to maintain "consistent and frequent contacts" with patrons.

- How do you give people a voice in planning new programs? The Quilcene, Wash. Board of five members asked people in their community of 1,000 to ballot on membership of a 30-person steering committee—they sent newsletters and ballots to everybody. Says the board president: "It is easier to win support for a program people themselves have helped plan than to present them with a cut-and-dried package they don't know anything about. One year for planning a new school program is not too much. But you must have dynamic people who will invest their time." For three years now more than two-thirds of the voters have levied "excess taxes" on themselves to support improvements in Quilcene's schools for 300.

- You can do a great deal without a lot of money if you have dedicated volunteers. Once a week, 53 members of a Philadelphia, Pa. church tutor disadvantaged school children on a one-to-one basis. A church-owned mini-bus brings the 53 children to the church annex for reading, educational games and friendly conversation with tutors who care about their education and care about them as people.

- Sometimes school systems do an "about face." The community of Niles, Mich., which for years had boasted of its schools, in 1972 found the price—taxes—was going up while "production and the product" weren't keeping pace. Students were "getting away with everything at school . . . Teachers didn't care. . . .The administration had other things to do."

The district set up teams of students, parents, teachers, administrators to list and categorize their problems. A central one: "Schools' lack of concern for the individual, be he student, parent, teacher or resident." Another: "The schools' traditional emphasis on academic values as opposed to humanistic values."

The teams recognized that you can't change communication, behavior and attitudes overnight, but they began. After study they made recommendations about disciplinary procedures, final exams, the student cafeteria and lounge, school spirit and school government, which are now being carried out. The board arrived at some new goals, including "to provide a school environment which places equal stress on the student's personal and social development as well as on his intellectual development." That has meant modifying the curriculum and revising the district budget—actually at reduced cost for management. Also, administrative responsibilities have been altered. Says a spokesman: "Never again should a student or parent—frustrated about school—receive the answer: 'That's beyond my control.' 'I can't do anything about it.' Our confidence in our schools and ourselves is slowly coming back."

If these two checklists don't fit your local situation, you can profit from adapting them or developing your own.

How does your school board rate?

In scoring, Very Low = 0, Low = 3, Average = 5, High = 7, and Very High = 10.

Scores

1. What proportion of school board meetings are open to the public? (The higher the percentage of public meetings and the more welcome people feel, the higher you would rate the board on a scale of 1 to 10). _____

2. Is your school board dominated by any one person? Any one family? Any one racial or occupational group? Any one political party? Any one "faction" in the community? (If the answer is *yes*, give the board a score of 0 to 3, otherwise a higher number.) _____

3. Do board members seem more interested in money, budgets, busing than in the quality of edu-

cation children get? (If they seem more interested in "mechanics" give a low score; if they are looking for ways to upgrade teaching and learning opportunities, give the board a high score.) _____

4. Does the board ever consider what students think, want and need? (If students have contact with the board, have a say in student government, express opinions in the school paper, you would probably give the board a high score if you believe students need to develop skill in decision-making.) _____

5. Does your school board ever "sweep under the rug" questions which are controversial? (If there is free, open public discussion, you would give the board a high score here.) _____

6. Do your board members go to state meetings of school board associations to update themselves and get new ideas? (If *yes*, score them high; if not, low.) _____

7. Are the basic skills—reading, communication, math, etc.—taught effectively in your schools? (If you can say *yes*, score the board high here.) _____

8. Is there any discrimination in your school—against a racial or religious group? Against girls? Against students interested in vocational training rather than a pre-college course? Against anyone who comes from a home with too little money? (If so, score the board low on this question.) _____

9. Does your board have written policies and goals? (If *yes*, score them high.) _____

10. Is the educational program "individualized" enough to hold the interest ofthe great majority of students—say, 95%? (If you think not, score the board low.) _____

Total _____

If your board scores under 65 on these 10 questions, maybe you need to see that the board takes steps to represent you better!

How do you rate as a school patron or parent?

In scoring, Very low = 0, Low = 3, Average = 5, High = 7, and Very High = 10.

Scores

1. How often do you visit your child's school to learn about his performance, progress, emotional health? (If almost never or once a year, score yourself 0 to 3 on a scale of 1 to 10.) _____

2. Have you arranged a comfortable, pleasant place for your child to have a regular "study time"—a place with good light, good chair, table? (If the answer is *yes*, score yourself high.) _____

3. Do you look upon kindergarten mainly as a babysitting service instead of as a learning experience? (Be honest with yourself. If you do, score yourself low here.) _____

4. Are you what professionals call a "bleeding heart," a person who is extra emotional on all subjects and seldom stops to analyze a situation with logic and common sense? (If you are, don't give yourself much of a score here.) _____

5. Are you mainly interested in how much schools add to your tax bill? Are you also eager for the quality of education to be upgraded? (If you answer *yes* to second quetion, score yourself high.) _____

6. Do you want the schools to stay as they were when you were a student? (If you are allergic to change in educational purposes and methods, don't give yourself a high grade here.) _____

7. Do you want schools to concentrate on helping students "get ahead in the world"? Or do you want schools also to give attention to helping them become happier, more fulfilled people and citizens? (If you answer *yes* to second question, score yourself higher.) _____

8. Have you ever encouraged your child to use the school library and have you set a good example in your own reading habits? (Score yourself high, if you have.) _____

9. Have you ever volunteered to help with a school activity—a health clinic, athletic event, book fair, money-raising for sports or band equipment, chaperoning? (If you leave all this to other people, give yourself a low score.) _____

10. Do you talk to your pre-schooler to prepare him for school--make it seem important, pleasant—not boring or frightening? _____

Total _____

If you score 65 or under, maybe you need to turn over a new leaf!